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*Congress of the United States*  
*House of Representatives*  
*Washington, DC 20515-4209*

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IN EUROPE (U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

April 21, 2020

Mr. Stephen Dickson  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Mr. Daniel K. Elwell  
Deputy Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Dickson and Deputy Administrator Elwell,

As the Congressional Representative of the second busiest cargo airport in the world and now the fifth busiest airport in traffic activity in the nation, I was pleased to support the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which included \$10 billion in economic relief for U.S. airports affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> However, when the grants were announced on April 14, 2020, I was disappointed to learn that the funding has been disproportionately awarded to several smaller, less trafficked airports.

In my home state of Tennessee, I was shocked to learn that the McGhee Tyson Airport in Knoxville received \$25,830,652 in funds while the Memphis International Airport received \$24,687,552. This is peculiar for several reasons including that the McGhee Tyson Airport had 2.5 million passengers in 2019 compared to the 4.6 million passengers that flew through the

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<sup>1</sup> Benson, Nick, "8 April: US & Canada COVID-19 Aviation Traffic Report," JetTip, <https://jettip.net/blog/8-april-us-canada-covid-19-aviation-traffic-report>

Memphis International Airport in the same year. That does not include Memphis's air cargo volume, which was 4.47 million metric tons of cargo in 2018.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, it has been reported that other smaller airports have been recipients of a disproportionate amount of funding while larger airports have only received enough funding to sustain their operations for three or four months.

For instance, the Devils Lake Regional Airport in North Dakota received \$16.9 million, which is enough to sustain its current operations for fifty years. The Mason City Municipal Airport in Mason City, Iowa, received \$17.5 million, which is enough to sustain its operation for twenty-nine years.<sup>3</sup> And, the Barnstable Municipal Airport in Hyannis, Massachusetts, received \$18 million, which is double the airport's planned Fiscal Year 2021 budget.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of the CARES Act emergency relief is to support U.S. airports that are experiencing severe economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 public health emergency, not to bolster or double smaller airports' budgets based on an arbitrary formula.

I respectfully request that the FAA suspend its CARES Act payments to airports immediately until Congress can address this severe funding flaw that is prohibiting adequate support for our nation's airports.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. Should you have any questions regarding these requests, please contact Alex Schnelle in my office at [alex.schnelle@mail.house.gov](mailto:alex.schnelle@mail.house.gov) or 202-225-3265.

Sincerely,



Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress

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<sup>2</sup> Garland, Max, "Memphis International Airport grows cargo volume despite U.S. trade tensions," Commercial Appeal, <https://www.commercialappeal.com/story/money/industries/logistics/2019/03/25/memphis-international-airport-fedex-cargo-growth/3270017002/>

<sup>3</sup> Grey, Jamie and Lee Zurik, "'Windfall': Funding formula allows some small airports to cash in big on stimulus money," WILX, <https://www.wilx.com/content/news/Windfall-Funding-formula-allows-some-small-airports-to-cash-in-big-on-stimulus-money-569807311.html>

<sup>4</sup> Genter, Ethan, "Cape and islands to receive \$26m in federal aid," Cape Cod Times, <https://www.capecodtimes.com/news/20200415/cape-and-islands-airports-to-receive-26m-in-federal-aid>